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ABSTRACT

The history of grammar instruction in second language education is traced, focusing on the evolution of grammar's role from a central place in instruction to its current peripheral, almost problematic role. The objective is to provide background information so that second language educators can redefine grammar's role in language instruction. The dominant mode of grammar instruction from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century was the grammar-translation method, which was promoted as good mental training and used both explicit and deductive teaching methods. This approach was challenged by proponents of second language learning in the same natural context as first language learning, then by emphasis on reading skills. The audiolingual method evolved after the second world war, aimed at developing all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and its successor, the cognitive method, emerged soon after. Subsequently some controversial methods, including Total Physical Response, the Monitor Model, the Natural Approach, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, and Suggestopedia evolved, each with a different approach to grammar learning. Contains 67 references. (MSE)

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Grammar in the Second Language Classroom: An Ever-Changing Role

ED 424 752

Carolyn Lally
5113 Capitol Ave
Omaha, NE 68132

(402) 554-2862 office
(402) 553-7356 home
clally@cwis.unomaha.edu

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Abstract

For centuries there was a consensus among language teachers concerning the pedagogical effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction. The rapid succession of language-learning theories and methods witnessed throughout the twentieth century, however, suggests that the profession has become uncertain about the function of grammar in the language classroom. This essay retraces grammar's journey from an object of study to a subject of controversy. Indeed, as educators move forward in search of the precise role of grammar in the second language classroom, we must not forget to examine past mistakes and triumphs.

Grammar in the Second Language Classroom: An Ever-Changing Role

Introduction

The precise role of grammar in the second language classroom is different for almost every language instructor and has been modified by each succeeding language theory and method (Rivers, 1983). Some theorists and practitioners consider grammar to be the goal of second language instruction (Huguenet, 1959), while others view it as a tool to be used in, and subordinate to, communication (Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith, 1988), and still others have banished grammar from the curriculum entirely (Brinton, Snow, and Wesche, 1989). In addition to a variety of personal opinions on the topic, recent movements within the profession such as communicative competence and the proficiency movement have refrained from offering a definite framework in which to situate grammar in the language classroom (Buck, Byrnes, and Thompson, 1989; Savignon, 1983). Indeed, what was once the focus of language study, has now become controversial (Omaggio Hadley, 1993).

This essay will retrace grammar's path from pith to pariah in order to provide language teachers with the background knowledge necessary to help them redefine the role of grammar in today's second language classroom.

The Role of Grammar in Instructional Methods: An Early Historical Perspective

For centuries, there seemed to have been a consensus that grammar instruction belonged in the classroom. In fact, the dominant method of second language instruction from the late eighteenth to the

early twentieth century, the grammar-translation approach, viewed grammar as the sole means to, and at times even the goal of, language study.

One of the basic goals of the grammar-translation approach to language instruction was to engage students in mental gymnastics. Many teachers and students believed Greek and Latin to be "more perfect and more highly developed in structure than modern [languages] and that their study [provided] better training for the mind" (Sweet 271). Therefore, the training of the student's mind through an emphasis on, and manipulation of, grammatical rules was due in part to the fact that language instructors were trying to show that modern languages (usually French, German, and Spanish) were just as valuable as classical languages such as Latin or Greek. A second goal of the grammar-translation method was the teaching of languages as a tool to be used in accessing the literature and philosophy of another culture (Rivers, 1983).

The development and training of the mind, as well as of translation skills, was accomplished through a deductive form of teaching, moving from the statement of the rule to the example. In the classroom, the student was the passive recipient of rules and engaged in practice activities and in translation exercises, requiring the application of explicit grammar rules or "general laws" (Sweet 73). Listening activities took the form of dictations, and speaking practice was accomplished by having students read a passage aloud in front of the class. In other words, genuine communication skills were ignored.

The dominant role of explicit and deductive grammar in the language classroom as defined by the grammar-translation approach was challenged by the succeeding direct method of language instruction. Late

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advocates of the direct method, such as Berlitz and Goun, believed that second language learning should proceed in the same natural context as first language learning. The direct method emphasized speaking before reading and viewed the target language as the medium as well as the object of instruction (Benseler and Schulz, 1980; Handschin, 1926; Omaggio Hadley, 1993). Handschin (1926) believed that the best method of imparting linguistic forms is to make them first appeal to the ear. In addition, the direct method replaced the bilingual vocabulary lists, which were characteristic of the grammar-translation approach, with a direct association of words with objects and actions. Comprehension was acquired through the foreign language and gestures (Meras, 1954). In fact, for Palmer (1922) "all methods which teach meaning by means of etymology are of the studial order; nature intended that each word should become attached to that for which it stands" (14). However, one of the most radical changes brought about by the direct method was the role of grammar in the classroom. Grammar in the direct method was not taught in an explicit and deductive manner, as in the grammar-translation class, but was acquired through practice. In the direct method, students were encouraged to create their own structural generalizations from what they had been learning through inductive activities. According to Rivers (1983), the study of grammar in the direct method was kept at a functional level and was confined to areas which were continually used in speech. If grammar was taught, it was done in the target language while using target language terminology.

In contrast to the pugnacious "down with grammar, away with grammar" slogan espoused by most proponents of the direct method,

Krause (1919) maintained that "grammar should not be taught for its own sake, but it should be taught in conjunction with the foreign language, which should be the language of the classroom, thus making a direct appeal" (56). The elimination of explicit grammar instruction and the avoidance of mechanical pattern drills and translations, suggested by proponents of the direct method, has prompted an explicit-versus-implicit grammar debate that continues even today.

In the 1930s a new method, that considered the acquisition of reading skills to be the primary goal of language instruction, began gaining recognition. The 1929 Coleman report entitled The Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages in the United States recommended that the average two-year time period of language study for American students was not sufficient for the development of all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Therefore, Coleman recommended that all foreign language instructional efforts be devoted to the teaching of reading skills. Among Coleman's "immediate objectives of language instruction" is the ability to read books, newspapers, and magazines in the modern language. Among "ultimate objectives" Coleman names the ability to read a foreign language with moderate ease and with enjoyment for recreative and for vocational purposes. This new emphasis on reading, to the near-exclusion of all other skills, became known as the reading method. Contrary to the grammar-translation method, students were trained to extract meaning from a text, not to translate. The role of grammar and explicit rules in the reading method lay somewhere between that of grammar-translation and that of the direct method. For example, there was some explicit grammar instruction that took place in the reading method classroom; however, grammar presentation was limited

to sufficient verb tense instruction necessary for reading comprehension. More important, students were only responsible for recognition of grammar rules and forms, not reproduction.

During and after World War II, national officials and individual instructors alike began to realize that many Americans were unable to communicate in a foreign language, even after years of study (Bloomfield, 1945). This realization helped promote a renewed interest in the study of modern languages and resulted in swelling enrollment figures. With new attention being directed toward languages, the percentage of high school students studying modern languages rose from 16.4 percent in 1958 to 26.4 percent in 1965 and graduate enrollment grew 77.8 percent between 1960 and 1963 (Kant, 1969). Thus, an increased interest in languages, an unprecedented emphasis on oral skills, and an accompanying increase in government funding for the study of foreign languages helped create a climate conducive to the development of the audiolingual method of language instruction that many believed would become the "one true way" (Strasheim 41).

The Aural-Oral, New Key, Functional Skills, American, or Scientific Method was renamed the Audio-Lingual Method in 1960 by Nelson Brooks. The Aural-Oral, or audiolingual, approach was strongly influenced by both structural linguistics and behavioral psychology. B.F. Skinner's behaviorist view of language learning considered language learning to be the result of operant conditioning. For Skinner, humans are able to learn language because some verbal forms are reinforced and others are not. This behaviorist view of language learning corresponded with the beliefs of many structural linguists at the time. For example, it was Bloomfield's opinion that language learning should involve the over-

learning of structural forms, rather than superficial exposure to written grammatical exercises, and that children receive "impressions on a blank slate" (Bloomfield 634). With the help of Bloomfield, structural and behaviorist language learning theory soon evolved into practice in the Army Specialized Training Program intensive language courses. This method, which was first taught at the Defense Language School in the 1940s, began to dominate academic programs in the 1950s and 1960s.

William Moulton lists the following slogans resulting from the influence of structural linguistics and behavioral psychology on the language teaching profession:

1) language is speech, not writing,

2) language is a set of habits, and

3) teach the language not about the language. (87)

In other words, the fusion of structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology resulted in a new method of language instruction that viewed language learning as a form of conditioning.

While the audiolingual method aimed at developing all four skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing), a strong emphasis was placed on speaking skills. Audiolingual instruction was essentially composed of three components: the presentation of a dialogue, repetition of the dialogue and subsequent pattern drills by the student, and application activities. The role of grammar instruction in the audiolingual method is slight. In fact, very few explicit grammar presentations or rules were given to the students. Instead, students were to create their own grammatical generalizations through analogy during drill activities (Benseler and Schultz, 1980). Moreover, proponents of the audiolingual method believe that students should be able use language

subconsciously, like native speakers, without conscious manipulation of grammar rules.

A major reaction against the behaviorist audiolingual approach to language instruction was the cognitive method. A new interest in the cognitive, internal, or mentalistic theories of language learning was prompted by Chomsky (1957; 1959; 1968). Chomsky rejected Skinner's empiricist view of language learning and proposed, instead, that language is an innate, species-specific capacity regulated by a language acquisition device (LAD). In essence, by arguing that language is too complex to be explained by behaviorist theories, Chomsky espouses a mentalistic, rationalist view of learning and language closely tied to the basic assumptions of cognitive psychologists. In fact, for Chomsky the system of linguistic competence is "qualitatively different from anything that can be described in terms of the taxonomic methods of structural linguistics [or] the concepts of S-R psychology" (4). Although Chomsky was describing first language learning, his writings served to upset the dominance of behaviorist methodologies, such as audiolingualism, and allow for the emergence of other mentalistic or cognitive methods. In addition to Universal Grammar, Chomsky's transformational-generative (TG) grammar and government and binding theory (GB), continue to shape language learning theory and methodology.

Whereas the audiolingual method can be considered as the direct descendant of behavioral psychology and structural linguistics, its successor, the cognitive method is the result of both cognitive psychology and transformational-generative grammar (Chastain, 1976). The cognitive method views language not as a set of habits, but as a conscious, creative activity. For example, classroom procedures of the

cognitive method are designed to: 1) build on what the student already knows, 2) allow the student to create meaning, and 3) avoid rote learning. The basic goal of the audiolingual method and of the cognitive approach to language instruction is the same: both seek to teach students to handle language unconsciously, like native speakers (Benseler and Schulz, 1980; Omaggio Hadley, 1993). However, in addition to having vastly different theoretical underpinnings, audiolingualism and the cognitive approach disagree on the place of grammar in the classroom. For example, whereas audiolingualism uses pattern drills and presents new grammatical structures inductively, a cognitive approach to grammar instruction uses traditional exercises and deductive grammar explanations (Chastain and Woerdehoff, 1968). Because the cognitive method teaches language through formal grammatical analysis and cognitive exercises (Benseler and Schulz, 1980), the presentation of new grammatical structures in a cognitive classroom takes place through explicit examples and explanations. In addition, the goal of cognitive grammar practice exercises is "the comprehension of forms, the conscious learning of forms, and the conscious selection of forms to fit the context" (Chastain 151). Clearly, while reemphasizing the role of the student's mind and cognitive abilities in the language learning process (somewhat reminiscent of the grammar-translation's goal of training the mind), the cognitive method also reinstates explicit grammar presentation and practice into the classroom. In fact, the cognitive code learning method is often referred to as a "modified grammar-translation approach" (Rivers 5).

Chronologically, the first major language learning method to follow the various cognitive approaches was the Total Physical Response (TPR)

technique (Asher, Kusudo, and de la Torre, 1974). Rivers (1983) noted that in general, language teachers have always been fascinated by the effortless, enjoyable, and successful experience of little children learning their first language. This fascination with children's pleasant and casual acquisition of their first language inspired and shaped the Total Physical Response approach. For Asher the relative superiority of children who learn a second language compared to adults is not the result of "some unknown gift for language learning" (1-31), but rather it is due to the fact that children are spoken to in short directives and commands that require the performance of a kinesthetic event (Asher, 1988). For example, according to Asher, young children acquire a second language when caretakers speak to children in the target language while providing a series of directions for the child to follow. Caretaking commands guide the child through activities such as bathing, eating, dressing, and playing. Asher and other proponents of the Total Physical Response methodology believe that by integrating physical command activities into the foreign language classroom, there will be a "dramatic gain in comprehension" (2-6) for children and adult language learners. Thus, the three key ideas of the Total Physical Response approach are the following:

1) Comprehension of spoken language must be developed before the student engages in speaking.

2) Comprehension and retention is best achieved through the movement of students' bodies in response to commands.

3) Students should not be forced to speak before they are ready. Speaking will emerge naturally (Benseler and Schultz,1980).

In spite of numerous studies supporting the effectiveness of Total

Physical Response (Asher, 1963; 1965; 1972; 1974; 1979), many language instructors question the comprehensibility of this method. For Omaggio Hadley (1993), Total Physical Response is not a method in and of itself, "but represents instead a useful set of teaching ideas and techniques that can be integrated into other methodologies for certain instructional purposes" (107). Although Asher (1988) believes that "listening comprehension maps out the blueprint for future acquisition of speaking" (2-3), a common criticism of the Total Physical Response method is the lack of classroom attention given to speaking, reading, and writing. Another commonly posed question is if the majority of Total Physical Response class time is devoted to development of listening comprehension through physical response to commands, what role does grammar instruction play in the Total Physical Response classroom, if any? In response to this type of question and criticism, Asher, Kusudo, and de la Torre (1974) state that most of the grammatical structures of the target language can be learned through the physical commands given by the instructor. As far as explicit grammar presentations are concerned, Asher et al. suggest that only an occasional few minutes at the end of class be spent putting structures on the blackboard, and then only at the students' request. Asher (1988) believes that there is a "transfer-of-learning from understanding spoken [language] to reading, writing and speaking" (2-6). Therefore, grammar instruction, in and out of the classroom, is not necessary. For example, proponents of Total Physical Response believe that students will naturally come to understand the past tense without ever receiving rules or explicit instruction concerning its composition and use (Asher, 1988).

One of the most well-known and, by some accounts, controversial

language learning theories of the 1970s and 1980s is Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model. The Monitor Model has had considerable influence on language instruction, provoking strong reactions, both positive and negative, from researchers in second language acquisition and learning (Barasch and James, 1995). Krashen's theoretical model is composed of five hypotheses (Krashen and Terrell,1983). The first hypothesis, the acquisition-learning hypothesis, asserts that humans have two ways of "becoming competent" (Krashen and Terrell 26) in a second language. The first way of becoming competent is by acquisition, that is, by subconsciously using language for real communication. The second way of becoming competent in a second language is via learning. For Krashen and Terrell, learning implies a conscious knowledge of grammatical structures, and the ability to apply and verbalize explicit language rules. The second hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, states that grammatical structures are acquired in a specific and predictable order. The third hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, states that learning, or the conscious knowledge and manipulation of grammatical rules, acts as a monitor or editor of utterances initiated by acquisition. However, the monitor can only be evoked when certain conditions are met. For example, the performer needs to have enough time to access grammar rules; the performer must be focusing on form, rather than on content; and the performer must know the rule in question. The fourth hypothesis, the input hypothesis, states that in order for students to move to higher stages of acquisition, they need to be exposed to structures slightly beyond their current level of of competence. These unacquired structures (i + 1) can become comprehensible through context and other extra-linguistic information. The final hypothesis is

the affective filter hypothesis. The affective filter hypothesis states that acquisition can only occur when the performer has low anxiety, self-confidence, and is motivated.

Krashen's theoretical model has done more than generate dialogue and incite intellectual debate; it has also given form to a method of language instruction. The Natural Approach, developed by Terrell (1977), is based entirely on Krashen's Monitor Model. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), the "five simple principles of the Natural Approach are completely consistent with the hypotheses" of Krashen's Monitor theory (59). For example, the acquisition-learning hypothesis affects the organization of the natural approach classroom by assuring that "most of the classroom time is spent on activities which foster acquisition [whereas] learning exercises [. . .] always play a more peripheral role" (59). In addition, an instructor using the Natural Approach does not correct student errors. The lack of in-class correction is a direct reflection of both the affective filter hypothesis, which suggests creating a low-anxiety learning environment, and the natural order hypothesis, which purports that by allowing student errors to occur without undue emphasis on error correction, the Natural Approach teacher allows the natural order to take its course. Finally, the input hypothesis is reflected in the Natural Approach's emphasis on exposing students to large amounts of comprehensible input. In spite of the strict adherence of the Natural Approach to the theories of the Monitor model, the Natural Approach is nevertheless flexible concerning the types of teaching techniques used in the classroom.

Thus far, it is clear that Terrell's Natural Approach is a direct descendant of Krashen's theories. However, it is necessary to examine

the precise role of grammar in both the theory and the practice of the theory. As mentioned above, Krashen's Monitor Model makes a pronounced distinction between acquisition, the unconscious picking-up of a language, a certain "feel for correctness" (Krashen and Terrell 58), and learning, which requires the conscious application of rules of grammar to language production. In both theory and practice, Krashen and Terrell stress the categorical superiority of acquisition over learning. Implications of this preference manifest themselves in the classroom by the "limited function" (Krashen and Terrell 18) of conscious grammar rules. Indeed, Terrell (1977) suggests that all grammatical instruction and practice activities should be done outside of class "so that classroom time is not wasted in grammatical lectures or manipulative exercises" (330). With grammar instruction and drills banned from the classroom, more time can be spent on communication activities and exposure to comprehensible input. Focusing class time and students' attention on communication instead of grammar rules allows for more exposure to comprehensible input and encourages more language acquisition (Krashen and Terrell, 1983).

Krashen and Terrell recommend that the monitor (the use of rules) be avoided in normal interaction and in classroom conversations because there is not enough time to comprehend input, to think an appropriate response, to generate the response, and to self-correct under the time constraints of natural conversation (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). Nevertheless, both Krashen and Terrell do concede that rules and grammar instruction play a role, albeit very limited, in language acquisition. For example, Terrell (1977) believes that a conscious manipulation of grammar rules should be applied when writing or in

prepared speech. In addition, if grammar explanations must be done in the classroom, Krashen and Terrell recommend that they be short, simple, and in the target language.

In spite of the clear aversion of grammar of the Monitor Model and the Natural Approach (Krashen, 1981; 1982; Krashen and Terrell, 1983; Terrell, 1977), it seems as though Terrell later modified his strict aversion of form-focused instruction. For example, Terrell (1991) describes explicit language instruction as an aid or tool for the learner in the acquisition process and discusses the role of grammar as an advance organizer. Terrell's 1991 revisions do not negate his initial position on the role of grammar in language acquisition--Terrell still preferred communication to grammar. Rather, this modified attitude places more emphasis on the subordinate function of grammar that Terrell initially maintained.

Several humanistic, or "radical" (Blair 11) approaches, such as the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, and Suggestopedia appeared between the 1960s and 1990s. Although highly controversial (Blair, 1983; Stevick, 1980), the humanistic approaches served to further generate interest in and discussion of second language learning (Blair, 1983; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Stevick, 1980).

The Silent Way was first presented by Gattegno in 1976. The silent partner in this approach is the teacher whose work is considered to be subordinate to that of the students. The teacher must play a passive speaking role in order to assess continually the students' abilities. There are two important learning tools used in the Silent Way. First, there are two color-coded charts containing the spellings for syllables in the native and in the target language. Second, the teacher uses a set of colored rods to convey meaning. The teacher demonstrates a new word or structure by

manipulating the rods. After the initial presentation, the instructor remains silent while students repeat what was presented in the target language and take turns manipulating the same gestures with the colored rods. In addition to presenting basic concepts such as numbers and colors, "any and all grammatical structures that the teacher thinks the student needs" (Stevick 44) are presented using the colored rods. In other words, grammar is presented and taught in the classroom, but there is no explicit introduction to rules or to drills and "there is no memorization [and] no translation" (Stevick 45).

Community Language Learning, or Counseling-Learning, was introduced by Curran, also in 1976. For Blair (1982), Curran's approach "takes into account dimensions of both psychological and social phenomena that characterize human behavior and social interaction in learning and instruction" (10). Curran (1982) describes five stages of his method (123) where students, or "clients" begin the first stage by speaking with one another in their native language and the teacher, or "counselor," translates all utterances into the target language. Throughout the second, third, and fourth stages, the students progressively speak more and more in the target language and reduce their dependence upon the counselor. In the fifth and final stage, the counselor only intervenes to add idioms and more elegant constructions. In this very brief description of Community Language Learning it would appear that grammar instruction plays no part in this method, and in part this is true. However, Curran (1983) adds that all class meetings should be tape-recorded so that students can reexamine their conversations with some attention given to grammar, although more emphasis is placed on the conversation itself. Additionally, counselors

can copy students' sentences onto notecards to demonstrate briefly points of grammar.

The final humanistic method to be discussed is Lozanov's Suggestopedia (1978). One of the most important features of Suggestopedia is the input of formidable amounts of material. For example, during the first class meeting it is not unusual for the student to be exposed to hundreds of new words and complex grammar through dramatic readings accompanied by classical music. This presentation of material is referred to as a concert. Specifically, there are two types of concerts: an active, conscious concert where students pay attention to the dialogues presented; and a passive, unconscious concert accompanied by Baroque music. The Baroque music is intended to relax the learner and facilitate acquisition. Finally, there is a follow-up session where students actively interact with the material presented through role-plays and other activities. As in the other humanistic methods mentioned, grammar instruction is minimal. In fact, short grammatical presentations are given only if the students request them and if the instructor feels they are needed, and presentations are provided in the native language.

The humanistic methods of the 1970s were replaced with methods based on in-class research. For example, in a series of articles from the mid-1980s to the present, VanPatten has been examining a method of "processing instruction," an explicit focus on form that is input based (VanPatten, 1986; 1988; 1990; 1992; VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten and Sanz, 1995). Unlike more traditional approaches to grammar instruction, processing instruction does not focus on the production of output. Rather, it is designed to alter the way in which

learners perceive and process linguistic data so that the learner will experience richer grammatical intake (VanPatten and Sanz, 1995). Processing activities involve carefully selected input that has been modified to emphasize specific grammatical elements. As with Asher's Total Physical Response, it is unclear whether VanPatten's input processing should be considered as a full-fledged method, or as another "useful set of [. . .] techniques that can be integrated into other methodologies for certain instructional purposes" (Omaggio Hadley 107). However, unlike Total Physical Response, input processing is a type of explicit in-class grammar instruction.

Conclusion

This summary of major methods of language teaching is not intended to be exhaustive. For example, many less publicized methods such as the natural method (Sweet, 1964), the eclectic method (Warriner, 1980), the series method (Gouin, 1880), the phonetic method (Cole, 1931), and others were not discussed. However, the description of the approaches that were presented, and the role of grammar instruction in each method, demonstrates that language learning is a complicated process and "grammar is clearly a thorny issue" (Garrett 134). Indeed, almost every method discussed takes a slightly different position on the precise role of grammar both in and out of the second language classroom. In general, methodologists, researchers, and teachers are divided. There are those who believe that classroom language learners develop grammatical competence from exposure to appropriate input, and there are others who believe that some explicit discussion of structure is needed (Garrett, 1986). It is this implicit-versus-explicit notion of in-

class grammar instruction with which today's foreign language instructors grapple. As we move forward in search of the precise function of grammar in the second language classroom, we must not forget to look back to see where we have already been.

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